

**Make-A-Wish Foundation®  
of America**  
4742 North 24th Street, Suite 400  
Phoenix, Arizona 85016-4862  
602-279-WISH, 800-722-WISH  
602-279-0855 fax  
wish.org



Data presented are based on two representative sample surveys – wish parents and volunteers – conducted and analyzed by an independent contractor.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

During 2010, the Make-A-Wish Foundation’s National Office led a study that defined the effects of wishes on the Foundation’s “community” and, for the first time, provided quantitative measures of the breadth and depth of the impact of the Foundation’s mission activities.

Conducted independently by a highly-qualified consulting firm, the study utilized interviews and discussions to identify and validate an extensive range of positive outcomes of wishes. Subsequent surveys of two constituent groups – parents of wish children and Foundation volunteers – substantiated the positive effects and provided quantitative measures of their impact. While each survey addressed respondents’ personal outcomes, both addressed outcomes for wish children and their families.

The overarching importance of the study is that the impact of the Foundation’s mission activities – previously supported by anecdotal, implied and intuitive knowledge and assumptions – has now been substantiated through independently derived measurements. The quantitative results presented in this report confirm that wish impact is not limited to the immediate emotional effects on wish children. Rather, our mission activities broadly impact a wide community, known to encompass the many thousands of people involved with or exposed to wish-granting.

The positive effects include emotional and social benefits, life enrichment, social awareness, inspiration, enhanced resilience and coping ability, gratification and – for wish children – improved strength and desire to overcome their illnesses.

Very high levels of positive responses demonstrate the extent to which the Foundation’s mission to “enrich the human experience with hope, strength and joy” is being accomplished. Wishes generate hope and a positive outlook, not just among wish children, but for their parents and volunteers alike. A wish is a source of emotional strength for children, helping them deal with their illnesses and substantially contributing to improved physical strength. Wishes also foster lasting joy and happiness for the children, their parents and Foundation volunteers.

Based on the study results, parents and volunteers believe that wish children receive much more than hope, strength and joy from their wishes. Emotionally, the wish contributes relief and decreased levels of anxiety to a wish child’s well-being. Inspiration, increased socialization and social interactions, and greater levels of compassion enhance the social health of wish children.

Life-enriching factors include “normal” life opportunities and improved quality of life.

Furthermore, a greater sense of empowerment and enhanced coping ability contribute to a wish child’s resilience. The study results provide measures of the extent to which parents and volunteers both perceive that wish children experience positive attitudinal changes, which can potentially lead to better health outcomes. Among these changes are an increased willingness to work toward getting better and compliance with treatment protocols. Improvements in wish

children's strength, mobility, energy level and overall condition can also result from wish experiences, as affirmed by large majorities of parents.

The wish experience also significantly impacts wish parents. Highly-rated outcomes include: (1) improved mental and emotional well-being, which are manifest in a greater sense of hope, a more positive outlook, decreased fear and anxiety, respite, and distraction from medical demands; (2) greater social well-being and awareness, as measured by increased levels of compassion and trust, greater philanthropic proclivity, and a desire to give back by helping others; (3) enriched lives through lasting positive memories and once-in-a-lifetime experiences; and (4) improved resilience, facilitated by increased empowerment and coping ability.

Family members of wish children and the collective family unit have shown to benefit substantially from the wish experience. The wish child's siblings largely exhibit reduced levels of fear and anxiety, while gaining opportunities to celebrate the uniqueness of the wish child. Family members experience stress relief and receive needed support, resulting in a strengthened family unit during particularly difficult times.

In addition to confirming parents' perceptions for the wish child and family, the Foundation's volunteers draw significant personal value from their wish experiences. They benefit emotionally (through increased hope and personal joy) and socially (through greater social awareness and better interpersonal connections, increased compassion, faith in humanity and acceptance of others). Their lives are also enriched (through heightened self-awareness, sense of compassion, and self-satisfaction), and they are largely inspired to deepen their commitment to philanthropy.

These results serve as the first milestone in the Foundation's effort to fully define the breadth and depth of our mission's impact on the community. Short-term plans include: additional interviews, surveys and case studies to define and quantify the impact of wishes on other constituent groups (including medical professionals), and – through their perceptions – on wish children and their families. In addition, work is underway to develop the framework for longitudinal comparisons that will better inform our progress toward the realization of our vision.

With reasonable prudence, the results presented in this report can be used to further our mission, but it is imperative that all results be used consistently and that they are fully supported by the data. The Foundation's Brand Advancement Department is currently developing messaging that can be used with a consistent voice, Foundation-wide, in marketing and communications pieces. In the interim, specific guidance is offered herein for other potential applications.

As we all digest the content of the Wish Impact Study results, it becomes clear that it contains many results that can be used in a myriad of ways. This memo is designed as a companion piece to the study, to distill the many valuable conclusions into three major areas that the wish process clearly appears to improve: health status, state of mind and community.

The study results show compellingly that the wish experience is viewed by wish kids, their parents and their wish-granting volunteers as more than a nice experience. It is a vital part of their battle against their life-threatening medical conditions, and it is a powerful force for creating stronger communities.

By June we hope to share with you results of the next phase of the study: findings from a survey of medical professionals about the impacts of the wish experience. In many respects, those results could prove to be the most compelling of all.

## Wish Impact Study Results Summary

### Overview

A wish come true empowers children with life-threatening medical conditions to fight harder against their illnesses. When they are granted a wish, they get more than just a great experience for a day, two days, or a week. That experience improves the quality of life for them and their entire family. And the community volunteers who grant wishes say the wish granting process heightens both their ability to see the best in others, and their commitment to actively help more people in need.

### Health Status

- Parents and volunteers observe that a wish come true makes kids feel stronger and more energetic.
- Wish kids are more willing to comply with difficult, but vital, treatment regimens.
- They describe the wish experience as a turning point in their health battle.

#### By the numbers:

- 89 percent observed increases in wish kids' emotional strength, which can help them improve their health status.
- 81 percent of parents observed an increased willingness by their wish kids to comply with treatment protocols.
- 75 percent of parents observed that the wish experience increased wish kids' physical health and strength.
- 74 percent saw the wish experience as a positive turning point in the wish kids' battle against their illnesses.

### State of Mind

- Children and their parents alike experience more happiness and less fear in their lives.
- Children are less isolated from friends, and feel a return of self-confidence that comes with feeling "normal" again.
- They are empowered to take back control of their lives, and to keep up the fight against their life-threatening medical conditions.
- Parents say their family units – often strained to the limit by stresses of the illnesses – are repaired and strengthened through the shared experience of the wish process.

#### By the numbers:

- 99 percent of parents reported that the wish experience gave their children increased feelings of happiness, and 91 percent observed that the wish experience decreased their children's depression or sadness.
- 98 percent of parents felt the wish experience gave them the opportunity to be a "normal" family again.
- 97 percent of parents said the wish experience strengthened their families.

- 92 percent of parents saw their children experience re-empowerment to take back the ability to make decisions in their lives.
- 84 percent of parents observed a decrease in their children's anxieties or fears.
- 88 percent of parents report they felt their own decreased sense of isolation.

### **Strengthened Communities**

- Volunteers feel an increased sense of compassion and desire to help others in their community.
- They feel a renewed faith in humanity.
- They trust others more and feel more optimistic about the future.
- They feel a greater long-term commitment to philanthropy.

#### **By the numbers:**

- 97 percent of volunteers reported feeling more grateful and thankful as a result of helping to grant a wish.
- 94 percent of community volunteers reported an increased sense of compassion.
- 92 percent of volunteers felt an increased desire to give back and help someone else's family.
- 91 percent of volunteers and 94 percent of wish parents expressed a deeper commitment to philanthropy and volunteering.
- 83 percent of volunteers felt an increased faith in humanity.
- 64 percent of volunteers felt increased trust in others.